



Patuxent River Oil Spill in Maryland

A cooperative natural resource damage assessment

In April 2000, a pipeline ruptured spilling more than 140,000 gallons of oil in Maryland's Patuxent River, a tributary of the Chesapeake Bay. The spill injured or destroyed numerous resources, including wetlands and beaches and hundreds of ruddy ducks and other birds.

While response agencies worked to contain and clean up the oil, NOAA, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the State of Maryland conducted a natural resource damage assessment (NRDA) of injured resources. These federal and state agencies act as trustees on behalf of the public to assess and restore resources injured by oil spills.

Trustee agencies worked cooperatively with Pepco and ST Services, the respective owner and operator of the pipeline, throughout the NRDA. In December 2002, these parties agreed to pay \$2,710,498, the cost of projects to restore injured resources and services.

Injured Natural Resources

To evaluate the oil impacts, trustees conducted multiple studies and found the oil affected the following—

- Wetlands - 76 acres
- Beaches - 10 acres
- Ruddy ducks and other birds - 696 dead
- Diamondback terrapins - 122 dead and a 10% reduction in hatchlings for 2000
- Muskrats - 376 dead
- Fish and shellfish - 5,432 lbs. lost
- Benthic communities - 4,974 lbs. lost
- Recreational services - 125,000 river trips impacted

Restoration

After a public review and comment period, trustees selected the following ecological and recreational restoration projects to address the above injuries.

Create roughly five acres of oyster reef sanctuary in the Patuxent River to address injuries to fish, shellfish, birds, and benthic communities. Oyster reefs enhance benthic communities, increase aquatic food for fish, birds, and waterfowl, and improve water quality by filtering out sediments and pollutants from the water column. The sanctuary has been officially designated, has been resurfaced with oyster shell, and today the last of ten million oyster spat will be seeded there. The oysters will be monitored for survival.

Create roughly six acres of intertidal marsh wetland adjacent to Washington Creek, a tributary of the Patuxent River. This wetland will be similar to those impacted by the spill and provide habitat for juvenile fish, shellfish, birds, and mammals; improve water quality by filtering sediments and other pollutants from the water column; and provide storm surge and flood protection. This project is in the final design phase and construction is being planned for 2005.

Enhance shoreline by creating roughly one acre of beach habitat to benefit diamondback terrapins and other organisms. This project is being designed in combination with the marsh project and will be constructed at the same time.

Restore ruddy duck nesting habitat and acquire perpetual protective easements in areas of the Prairie Pothole Region of the Midwest. Ruddy ducks breed in wetlands located in the Midwest and southern Canada and migrate to the Chesapeake Bay to spend the winter. Restoring and protecting their nesting habitats will enhance ruddy duck populations in the bay. Over sixty acres have been enrolled in the program, are protected by easements, and have already been restored. An additional 400 acres are

in the process of being enrolled and are expected to be restored this year.

Address the estimated 125,000 river trips affected by the spill—

- Create two canoe/kayak paddle-in campsites on the Patuxent River (one in Prince George's County and one in St. Mary's County). Construction is complete on these campsites.
- Establish a disabled-accessible kayak/canoe launch at Greenwell State Park in St. Mary's County. Engineering and design are in progress. Construction may be completed this year.
- Improve recreational opportunities at Maxwell Hall Natural Resource Management Area in Charles County. The county has begun final design and is planning to construct the project in 2005.
- Improve the Forest Landing boat ramp and replace existing fishing pier in St. Mary's County. Preliminary drawings are being reviewed for final design, and construction may be completed this year.
- Rebuild a boardwalk and provide canoes for a river education program at King's Landing in Calvert County. Engineering and permitting are underway.
- Establish boat access at Nans Cove in Calvert County. Design underway.
- Build a fishing pier at Cedar Haven in Prince George's County. In planning stage.

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